**NTIA Listening Session
on the Use of BEAD Remaining Funds**
Input from Connected Nation

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Connected Nation appreciates the opportunity to provide input to NTIA on the eligible uses for the BEAD Program remaining funds. This opportunity comes at a pivotal moment—not just for BEAD, but for the country's position in the global AI race.

As BEAD-funded last-mile projects begin to move forward, states will confront a hard truth: end-user access alone will not deliver the ambitions of our digital future, nor determine whether communities can compete in the AI economy. Artificial intelligence—especially inference, agentic systems, and generative AI—demands networks that deliver far more than last-mile connectivity. It requires increased **capacity, resiliency, and low latency** across the entire telecommunications stack.

This is where NTIA's guidance on remaining BEAD funds becomes incredibly consequential. With more than $21 billion expected to remain available, the decisions NTIA makes here will shape the nation's digital infrastructure for decades. This is not a marginal policy choice—it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that BEAD investments translate into lasting national competitiveness.

Connected Nation urges the NTIA to give special consideration for the following priorities as it determines the allowable uses of remaining funds for the BEAD program. **These initiatives will help states and territories maximize remaining BEAD investments and prepare for an AI-driven economy:**

- **SUCCESS for BEAD Act Priorities** – Invest in the infrastructure categories outlined in the SUCCESS for BEAD Act (S.3565/H.R.6920)—including the **construction of high-capacity wholesale fiber and conduit systems, internet exchange points, mobile wireless and submarine cable infrastructure, and NG911**. This infrastructure is foundational to ensure that every community in every state can participate in and benefit from AI innovations. Core internet infrastructure must adapt to a world where most content is non-cacheable, applications require ultra low-latency connections to function, and data traffic grows exponentially. Agentic and inferenced-based AI pose significant risks to the viability of the current internet ecosystem construct without investment in the next 24-36 months.

- **Data Collection, Validation, and Accountability** – Expanding support for continuous data gathering, modernized GIS mapping, AI-enabled analytics, and third-party validation of BEAD-constructed projects will ensure that deployment funds are used as intended and that states can leverage AI for monitoring, forecasting, and future preparedness.

- **National Security, Cybersecurity, and AI-Enabled Defense Outcomes** – Recognize that telecom infrastructure investments directly strengthen national security. NTIA should prioritize investments that enable AI-driven threat detection, reduce single points of failure, improve fiber route diversity, localize data traffic through IXPs, and support resilient communications

systems. AI-enabled cyber monitoring, anomaly detection, and automated incident response depend on robust fiber transport, edge, and exchange-point infrastructure—making these upgrades critical for both cybersecurity and the nation's broader defense posture.

- **Workforce and Skills Development** – Invest in programs that build the skilled workforce needed to deploy, operate, and secure increasingly complex networks. Without these investments, last-mile systems will face congestion and vulnerabilities that weaken federal goals and restrict economic opportunity. A strong telecommunications workforce ensures every state—not just a handful of regions—can support AI-enabled operations and compete for the jobs, innovation, and digital opportunity that modern broadband makes possible.

The White House has been clear that winning the AI race—particularly against China—depends on innovation and infrastructure, going so far as to state publicly that infrastructure is now the binding constraint on AI growth. That challenge extends well beyond energy infrastructure and last-mile access. AI performance will depend on enhancing the telecom ecosystem broadly.

Without these investments, last-mile networks will face congestion and fragility that undermine federal goals and limit economic opportunity. If we fail to invest in the full telecommunications ecosystem, AI benefits will concentrate in a handful of regions. But if we get this right, every state—rural and urban alike—can benefit from AI-driven investment, jobs, and innovation.

NTIA has a unique opportunity here to provide states with clear, forward-looking guidance that aligns remaining BEAD funds with the infrastructure demands of the AI era. Doing so would ensure that BEAD is remembered not just as an access program, but as the foundation of America's next great infrastructure build.

Connected Nation strongly urges NTIA to seize this moment and provide states the clarity they need to invest responsibly, decisively, and consequentially. The impact of this guidance will be felt for generations.

Thank you, and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

About Connected Nation
For 25 years, Connected Nation has been a national leader in driving growth in the broadband ecosystem. We provide support to states, territories, and communities through grant program administration, assessment and planning, data collection and GIS mapping, research, digital empowerment programming, and infrastructure development—helping states and territories build networks that are secure, resilient, and ready for the future.

Learn more at connectednation.org and IXP.us.